

Powder Point Bridge

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Hamadeh: Full Scale Bridge Inspection May Be Premature

The former chairman of the Powder Point Bridge Committee believes calls for a full inspection of the 11-year old Powder Point Bridge may be "about five years too soon," saying he suspects it is a waste of money at this time.

Former Selectman Abdul Hamadeh is a structural engineer and president of ASEC Corp. of Quincy, a firm which designs and inspects bridges. He said this week he has carefully looked over the bridge in recent months and plans to again with fellow structural engineer Selectman Andre Martecchini, who is a senior associate at Amman & Whitney Engineering, a firm in Boston which concentrates on bridge and pier work. Martecchini was directly involved in the South St. Seaport project in New York.

Martecchini also confirmed this week that he believed hiring a firm to perform a full inspection might be premature.

Both men said they would take the state inspection report which ranked the bridge mostly 7's and 8's on a 10 point scale and evaluate the findings. Martecchini said fellow bridge engineer Jeff Lewis of the town's highway safety committee and designer review committee will probably assist in the evaluation.

In a presentation to selectmen last week, the town's beach committee asked selectmen for their support of two resolutions. The first was to establish a FY 2000 capital budget line item for \$12,000 and for the cost of an engineering inspection of the bridge and the beach access ramp. The second was to fund a town meeting article for \$50,000 for any potential repairs that may be recommended in the inspection.

A recent state inspection of the bridge found the \$3 million bridge was in places rotting, eroding, and splintering and had warped boards, a loose plank, and settlement.

Hamadeh, who has 25 years of bridge work experience, said he would be very surprised to see any rotting. One of the reported split piles he said, happened during installation 11 years ago because it was not properly wrapped when it was being driven by hydraulic jet hammers.

Martecchini said he would like to complete the informal inspection with Hamadeh and Lewis before recommending on the beach committee article.

"We definitely need to do some maintenance but the extent remains to be seen," he said. He did not rule out supporting the beach committee request.

Hamadeh acknowledged some maintenance work is

definitely required.

The 2200-foot bridge is made of tropical hardwoods that are fire resistant and reported to require little maintenance. The piles are made of barcalous hard wood from South America and the superstructure is built from Bongossi wood imported from Africa.

Martecchini said that the wood has been used successfully for over 30 years in lock gate construction in Holland and Germany contrary to speculation by the beach committee that the bridge's situation was unique and not tested in a marine environment.

DPW Director Wally Tonzuck believes a full inspection is called for based on the state report.

"I think the state found evidence that the piling is starting to rot. It's really important to get a technical evaluation. "Maybe the state's inspection is adequate, maybe it's not. It's best to get the technical expertise of someone who deals with this type of wood. We can then program improvements," he said.

In addition, Tonzuck said the bridge has never been rated. "We really don't know the actual weight limit although it's been posted for 10 tons. A real rating should be done," he said.